

Letter from Taizé

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Consenting To What We Are In Order to Go Further

Throughout this year, we are reflecting on the different sections of Brother Alois' *Letter from Kenya*. In this issue, young adults from several different countries echo two themes from the beginning of the *Letter*: "Taking responsibility for our life" and "Led beyond ourselves".

FRANCE

So let us consent to what we are or what we are not; let us even take responsibility for all we have not chosen but which makes us who we are. (...) Even when overburdened, we will receive our life as a gift and each day as God's today. (*Letter from Kenya*)

Adrien, 27 years old, lives in the greater Paris area. He reflects on the Letter from Kenya after having recently fought with a serious illness:

When we are faced with a difficult trial in our life, sickness or death, we endure physical or moral suffering. We are assailed by a feeling of something unacceptable, incomprehensible, which can take us to the breaking-point.

In the depth of our suffering, we experience a feeling of utter destitution and of vulnerability. At the same time, in such painful circumstances, when we come to grips with how small and weak we are, we look at the difficulties of daily life in a different way. We do not pay attention any

longer to our everyday imperfections and frustrations, but rather welcome fully the gift of life that God gives us and the love we receive.

We see what really matters and what gives meaning to our life in a different light. We perceive even more powerfully the value of a love we receive that is far beyond us. Coming to terms with our condition enables us to assess the unique value of our existence—not idealized, but real, with its weaknesses and limits.

It can happen, however, that we look at our life with a critical eye, refusing to accept our limitations, reproaching ourselves for not meeting the aspirations that we sense. So we feel greatly relieved when we understand that God accepts us as we are. Our limitations and our aspirations are part of us. God loves us personally and knows us by name. This awareness gives us a new freedom because we know that God accepts us, and dispels our fear of the unknown because we know that he places trust in us.

Strengthened by this trust, we understand that we do not have to look outside ourselves in order to answer Christ's call. It is rather by starting with ourselves, and living in God's today, that we can follow him.

We come to see that the love of Christ is at work in this world today. In our daily lives, we can always seek to love our neighbors more fully in the space of freedom that He gives us and in the intensity of the

present moment. Through his resurrection, Christ tells us that everything has been accomplished and invites us no longer to be afraid. The trust and freedom that we receive from God invites us to become more and more available to other people. We know that Christ's message of love affects everyone just as it has affected us. Then we realize the importance of being present to others and listening attentively to them.

PORTUGAL

If God is in us, he also goes ahead of us. He takes us as we are, but he also draws us beyond ourselves. At times he comes to unsettle our life, overturning our plans and our projects. (*Letter from Kenya*)

João, a young adult from Portugal, writes:

In 1999 my bishop sent me to live, together with a young woman and a priest, in Aljezur, in the mountains near the coast, an area where there are three parishes.

Two years of intensive preparation with the bishop focused on life together, its advantages and its problems.

This was something new in our diocese, another way of being Church, a sign for the diocese: two lay people and a priest sharing goods and services.

Each has put his gifts at the service of the parish communities. The priest di-

True Freedom

Jesus said: "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (...) By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (John 5:19-23.30)

In our human existence, we spontaneously see as polar opposites freedom and following someone else. The alternative seems to be: either I do what I want, and then I am free, or else I obey passively another person or an outward reality. If I am free, we think, I am necessarily fully in control of myself.

When we read the Gospel, however, especially Saint John's Gospel, we discover that "in Jesus, a relationship with God and freedom were not mutually exclusive but rather reinforced one another" (*Letter from Kenya*). In the above text, Jesus says twice that he can do nothing by himself. At the same time, he says that he exercises prerogatives that normally belong to God alone: to give life and to judge.

The key to the riddle is found in a self-description of Jesus that reveals his basic identity. He is the Son, not simply because he is born of someone else, but because his entire being flows from a Source that he calls "the Father" or "the One who sent me". At every moment, he receives everything from that Source. His being is a being-in-relation. So for him, the fact of always seeking to do the will of that "Other" and the fact of being fully himself and thus free are not at all in contradiction with each other, because his being is made up of listening and responding.

In addition, Jesus brings his followers into his own relationship with God. We become sons in the Son (see Romans 8:14-17). It is thus up to us to find our freedom, like Jesus, not by following our own illusions but by welcoming the gifts with which God wants to fill us and by attempting to put into practice his loving will.

Concretely, how did Jesus bring together personal freedom and listening to the Father?

When do I feel free? Have I ever found freedom in putting God's will into practice?

Saint Augustine (354-430)

Who was this man who influenced so deeply the thinking of the West? For some he spoke of an unsurpassable way of grace, of God's love. For others he was guilty of a pessimistic view of human beings marked more by sin than by God's love. In the course of history, schools of theology of the most diverse sort claimed his authority, sometimes giving rise to bitter controversies.

But what has always fascinated people is his journey towards faith. By describing it in his *Confessions*, he helped many people to find Christ. His searching took many twists and turns. It was only when he was thirty that he finally said the "yes" to faith. Afterwards he confessed his hesitations and past mistakes, but at the same time he recognized in a sublime hymn of praise that God was with him without his having realized it.

You were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest.

In his homeland, North Africa, faith was nourished by the memory of martyrs. But popular Christianity, the kind his mother practiced, did not have great appeal to him as a youth. The Bible was also foreign to him; he could not take seriously the anthropomorphic stories about God. During a brilliant career as a professor first in Carthage, then in Rome, he began to seek the truth in religious circles more or less close to Christianity.

He was in Milan, capital of the empire at the time, at the height of his career, when his life was turned upside down. Ambrose, the bishop of the city, spoke of the Bible in a fascinating way. And Augustine was struck by the fact that "he was a humble man." Then one day, in a garden, a child's voice told him to open the Bible. He read the words of the apostle Paul and understood that these words could change a person's heart and their whole life. On the eve of Easter 387, he was baptized by Ambrose. The baptistery is still visible underneath the cathedral of Milan.

God of all loving, for each of us you wish a Gospel joy. And when we experience trials, a way forward remains open, that of abandoning ourselves in you.

3 Jn 10:11-15
SUN Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

4 Rm 8:5-11
Mon Paul writes: The Spirit seeks life and peace.

5 Lk 12:22-31
Tue Jesus said: Seek first God's Kingdom, and all other things will be given to you as well.

6 1 Tm 4:7-10
Wed Paul writes: The point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all people.

7 Dn 3:51-90 (A:65-67)
Thu O you who are faithful and humble in heart, bless the Lord! Sing God's praises for ever! His love is everlasting.

8 Jm 1:22-25
Fri James writes: Do not only listen to the Word, put it into practice.

9 2 Co 1:3-7
Sat Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

1 1s 50:4-9
Fri God wakens my ear every morning to listen as a disciple.

2 Lk 10:1-9
Sat Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

10 Jn 15:1-8
SUN Jesus said: I am the true vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

11 Mt 5:1-12
Mon Jesus said: How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.

12 Ga 2:15-21
Tue Paul writes: The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

13 1 Jn 4:16-21
Wed This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

14 Ep 3:14-19
Thu May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may you be rooted and established in love, so that knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

15 Rm 8:31-39
Fri St. Paul writes: I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

16 1 Co 13:8-13
Sat Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.

17 Jn 15:9-13
SUN Jesus said: This is my commandment — love one another as I have loved you.

18 Ex 20:1-21
Mon On Mount Sinai, God said: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery. You shall have no gods except me.

19 Lk 19:1-10
Tue Jesus said: The Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.

20 Ba 4:36-37
Wed The Lord says to his people: Look and see the joy that is coming to you from God.

21 Mk 16:15-20
Thu ASCENSION
After Jesus' Ascension, the disciples went out and proclaimed the Gospel everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word.

22 Jn 15:18-27
Fri Jesus told his disciples: When the Spirit of truth comes, who issues from the Father, he will bear witness to me.

23 1 Jn 2:3-11
Sat Whoever loves their brother or sister lives in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

24 Jn 17:6-11
SUN Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

25 Rm 12:14-21
Mon Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

26 Rm 12:3-13
Tue Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.

27 1 P 2:4-10
Wed Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight.

28 Lk 20:27-38
Thu Jesus said: God is not a God of the dead but of the living; for him all people are alive.

29 Ac 15:5-12
Fri Peter said: God, who knows human hearts, showed that he accepts all people by giving the Holy Spirit to all who believe.

30 Ph 1:3-11
Sat Paul writes: I am confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the day of Christ Jesus comes.

31 Jn 20:19-31
SUN PENTECOST
The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

MAY

DAILY READINGS

Mt 28:16-20

7 SUN Jesus said to his disciples: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jn 7:37-44

8 Mon Jesus cried out: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!

1 Co 6:12-20

1 Mon Anyone who unites themselves to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Ac 8:1-8

2 Tue The believers who had been scattered during the persecution went from place to place proclaiming the good news of the Gospel.

Lv 19:9-18

3 Wed You will neither be partial to the poor nor overawed by the great, but will administer justice to your fellow-citizen justly. Love your neighbour as yourself.

Rm 13:8-10

4 Thu St. Paul writes: Love does no harm to one's neighbour, and so love is the fulfilment of the Law.

2 Co 3:16-18

5 Fri Paul writes: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

1 Co 12:12-27

6 Sat Just as the body is one though it has many parts, so it is with Christ. We were all baptised into one body in one Spirit. You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Mt 14:12-26

14 SUN During the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, saying: Take this; this is my body.

Mt 6:31-34

15 Mon Jesus said: Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Do not worry about tomorrow.

1 K 19:8b-13a

16 Tue Elijah waited for God on Mount Sinai. A great wind arose, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came a voice of silence, and God spoke to Elijah.

Ep 2:1-10

17 Wed It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith. And this salvation does not come from you, it is the gift of God.

Jn 5:19-24

18 Thu Jesus said: As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Is 55:10-11

19 Fri The Lord says: As the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before they have watered the earth and made it fertile, so is it with the word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me before it has achieved its purpose.

Heb 10:19-25

20 Sat Without wavering, let us hold fast to the hope we have and seek to stimulate one another in love and goodness.

Mt 4:35-41

21 SUN When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

Mt 24:42-44

22 Mon Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Ga 1:11-24

23 Tue Paul writes: I want you to know that the Gospel I preached is no human message, nor did I receive or learn it from any human being, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Ac 13:23-25

24 Wed St JOHN THE BAPTIST As John was completing his work, he said: Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but one is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

Is 49:13-15

25 Thu Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

Ps 18

26 Fri God brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he loves me.

Ep 5:8-14

27 Sat You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

Mk 5:21-43

28 SUN To a man who had been told that his daughter was dead, Jesus said: "Do not be afraid, only have faith." Later, taking the child by the hand he said to her, "Talitha kum!" which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about.

2 Tm 4:6-18

29 Mon SS PETER AND PAUL Paul writes: I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give me.

Ep 4:11-16

30 Tue The body of Christ is being built until we all reach unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

Holy Spirit, enable us to turn toward you at every moment. So often we forget that you are dwelling in us, that you are praying in us, that you are loving in us. Your presence in us is trust and constant forgiveness.

JUNE

DAILY READINGS

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Talizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Risen Christ, by your Holy Spirit you live in us and to each one you say: "Come, follow me, I have opened for you a way of life."

5 Mk 6:1-6 **SUN** Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this?"

6 Mt 7:7-8 **Mon** I watch in hope for God who will save me. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

7 Ps 8 **Tue** Lord our God, how great is your name in all the earth. May your glory be sung by the mouths of children and babes in arms.

8 Lk 9:18-24 **Wed** Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

9 Ac 4:32-34 **Thu** All the first Christians were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had.

10 Sl 28:2-7 **Fri** Forgive your neighbor any wrongs done to you, and when you pray your sins will be forgiven.

11 1 S 2:1-4 **Sat** Hannah prayed in these words: My heart rejoices in the Lord and in his deliverance. There is no Holy One like the Lord, no Rock like our God.

1 Ac 17:22-28 **Wed** Paul said: In God we live and move and have our being.

2 Col 1:15-20 **Thu** God wanted all his fullness to dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself.

3 Ep 2:19-22 **Fri** St THOMAS You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

4 1 S 16:1-13 **Sat** The Lord said to Samuel: Take no notice of appearance. God does not see as human beings see: they look at appearances but God looks at the heart.

12 Mk 6:7-13 **SUN** Calling the Twelve apostles to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to change one's heart and they drove out many evil spirits.

13 Ws 11:21-26 **Mon** You are merciful to all, Lord, because you are almighty. You love everything that exists.

14 1 Co 10:23-31 **Tue** Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

15 Mt 7:1-5 **Wed** Jesus said: Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

16 Jn 3:1-8 **Thu** Jesus said: What is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows where it pleases: you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with those who are born of the Spirit.

17 Ps 142 **Fri** You are my refuge, Lord, my share in the land of the living.

18 Mt 18:12-14 **Sat** Jesus said: If a shepherd finds one sheep that was lost, it gives him more joy than ninety-nine others that did not stray at all. In the same way, your Father in heaven does not want even one to be lost.

19 Mk 6:30-34 **SUN** When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.

20 Ph 3:4-14 **Mon** Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

21 Jr 2:1-13 **Tue** The Lord says to his people: I remember the faithful love of your youth, when you followed me through the desert.

22 Jm 1:5-8 **Wed** James writes: God gives to all in simplicity, without reproach.

23 2 Co 5:16-21 **Thu** St. Paul writes: In the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God.

24 Mt 26:36-46 **Fri** Jesus said to his disciples: Stay alert and pray in order to withstand the trial. The spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.

25 Mt 20:20-28 **Sat** St JAMES Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

26 Jn 6:1-15 **SUN** After the people saw Jesus feed the crowd, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.

27 1 Co 2:1-9 **Mon** Paul writes: We announce what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the human mind cannot visualize: all that God has prepared for those who love him.

28 Col 1:15-23 **Tue** Paul writes: Persevere, standing firm on the solid base of faith, without drifting away from the hope held out by the Gospel.

29 Ex 22:20-21 **Wed** The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

30 Ezk 11:17-20 **Thu** The Lord says: I will give an undivided heart to my people. I will put a new spirit in them.

31 Rm 14:13-19 **Fri** Paul writes: Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle in the way of another.

JULY

DAILY READINGS

God of compassion, as we listen to your Holy Spirit, we long to remain trusting enough to be able to abandon ourselves to you in every situation.

2 Jn 6:28-35

SUN Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

3 1 Ch 29:10-20

Mon David prayed saying: Everything comes from you, our God, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are guests before you and passing visitors on this earth.

4 Jn 1:16-21

Tue Be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry, for human anger does not bring about God's justice.

5 Mt 5:38-48

Wed Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

6 Mt 9:2-10

Thu TRANSFIGURATION Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

7 Mt 18:21-22

Fri Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

8 Jn 8:31-36

Sat Jesus said: If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples. You will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free.

1 Dt 4:29-31

Sat The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

9 Jn 6:41-47

SUN Jesus said: It is written in the prophets, "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

10 Jr 31:15-20

Mon The Lord says: My people are so dear to me that, whenever I speak of them, I remember them lovingly. Therefore my heart yearns for them and has compassion on them.

11 Jn 5:30-47

Tue Jesus said: I seek to do not my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.

12 Ph 3:1-9

Wed Paul writes: For Christ I have accepted the loss of all other things — I look on them as rubbish so that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

13 Lk 6:46-49

Thu Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

14 Ps 63

Fri My soul is thirsting for you, my God, my body longs for you. Your love is better than life itself.

15 Lk 1:39-56

Sat THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord has come to the help of his servant, being mindful of his faithful love as he promised to our forefathers.

16 Jn 6:47-51

SUN Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

17 Ws 2:1,12-31

Mon God created human beings for an everlasting life, he made them in the image of his own nature.

18 1 P 3:8-17

Tue Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called.

19 1 P 5:6-11

Wed Peter writes: Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.

20 Mt 10:1-16

Thu Jesus said: Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be as shrewd as snakes and yet innocent as doves.

21 Zc 8:16-19

Fri The Lord says to his people: Within your gates render judgments that are true and make for peace. Yes, love truth and peace.

22 Mt 5:13-16

Sat Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

23 Jn 6:67-69

SUN Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

24 Ps 36

Mon In you, Lord, is the source of life; in your light we see light.

25 Ps 139

Tue Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Test me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

26 Dt 31:1-8

Wed The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

27 Jn 4:5-42

Thu Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

28 Jm 5:13-20

Fri Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

29 2 Tm 1:6-11

Sat Paul writes to Timothy: Share in my sufferings for the Gospel, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy.

30 Jm 1:17-27

SUN James writes: Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

31 Is 42:1-7

Mon The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.

AUGUST

DAILY READINGS

If God is present in everyone, what does faith add?

Confronted with the miracle of life, with our bodies so well "knit together" (Psalm 139), many people conclude that human beings are animated by a kind of divine spark. It is surprising that our modern mentality, so strongly marked by science, comes to the same conclusions as the "medicine" of the Old Testament. Yes, according to the Bible, God gives a Breath to human beings, and in that Breath of life God can become present (see Genesis 2). Breath and Spirit are the same word in Biblical Hebrew.

The desire of believers is for God to dwell within us by his Spirit, "witnessing together with our spirit" (Romans 8:16) so that we can "join together with the Lord, forming one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17).

If we have God in us, then, and everything seems to be already given, what use can there be of having faith?

During the recent European meeting in Brussels, Cardinal Danneels spoke to the participants in these terms: "I give thanks to God because every night, close to the Atomium, which is the symbol of human beings who investigate matter down to its depths, 40,000 young people came here to investigate the things of God. In the moments of silence at the heart of the celebrations, the Holy Spirit creates in us a hollow, a kind of little manger where the Child Jesus can be born."

It is so easy to fill those "hollows" with artificial needs. That is perhaps why faith is essential: it unblocks the desires of the soul. Faith is a longing, "the assurance of what we hope for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In this way, it teaches the soul to desire. As Saint Augustine says, "By letting himself be longed for, God extends desire; by letting himself be desired, he extends the soul; by extending the soul, he makes it capable of receiving him" (*Commentary on 1 John*, 4, 6).

God's presence in us is also a call. God calls us, not just to receive him, but "to be like him" (1 John 3:2). Already in the second century Saint Irenaeus of Lyons dared to state, "The Son of God became man so that man could become a Son of God" (*Adversus haereses*, III, 10, 2). Through the Son, the Spirit prepared to dwell within every human being: "The Spirit also came down upon the Son of God become Son of man, in this way becoming accustomed to dwell within the human race, to find rest among human beings" (III, 17, 1). Faith is the active participation of our desire in this transfiguration. It is the desire to become a son in the Son, to take an active part in the work of God.

rected and coordinated; the young woman was responsible for Christian formation and I taught religion. My job was the only one that provided an income for us.

In addition to these responsibilities, we all shared the pastoral work: I preside over the celebrations of the Word when the priest is not there to celebrate the Eucharist and I am also the presider at funerals in his absence.

Gradually something very interesting has developed: Christian formation for adults. We live in a rural area where the population is spread out, and it is very motivating to sense the thirst for God present in these people. Some walk several kilometers to attend the formation-meetings in the evening, sometimes in the cold or rain.

The three of us have always been very committed to the social dimension of Christian life. The first years we had a teenager staying with us. Previously the boy lived with the sheep and goats and had no house, no concept of hygiene, not even a rudimentary one. He did not know what a bathtub was or how to flush a toilet. When he arrived he was covered with fleas and lice. It was not easy for him to become part of our group, but gradually he has adapted. This has been one of my greatest lessons in life.

These ten years as a lay person appointed by the bishop have made me understand my Christian mission in this world better. The most important thing is not to do more, but to give ourselves to others with joy. Often that tires us out physically, but it makes us happy, because we make others happy.

I had other plans for my life; I was going to finish my law studies. I wanted to open a law-office, but God has changed my plans by sending me to Aljezur, for a life given to others.

There were many experiences that helped me make that decision and, among other things, there was Taizé. I will conclude on a very personal note, thanking God by saying once again how Taizé led me to discover a source from which springs humility, simplicity, peace of mind, self-giving and community spirit.

ENGLAND

What we are called to is to love more. And since love requires our entire being to express itself, it is up to us to find ways of being attentive to our neighbor, and to do so without waiting a moment longer.
(Letter from Kenya)

Lal is from Scotland and is a member of l'Arche. She talks of her commitment in that commu-

nity, where people with and without disabilities live together:

I arrived in l'Arche in London, as so many young people do, with a desire to give something of my time, and myself.

Daily life in l'Arche is simple, where people with and without disabilities share

meals,
work,
relax,
celebrate
and pray
together.

During my first few months in l'Arche, the daily tasks and responsibilities were straightforward; there were meals to prepare, people who needed

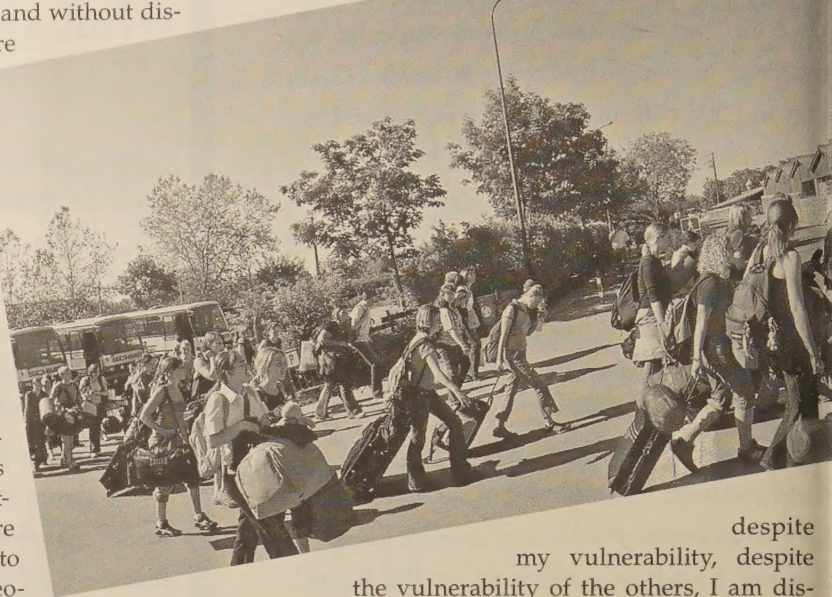
support to get up and go to bed, meetings to plan our week. At the same time, I felt increasingly out of my depth, without the familiar measures of success and failure—this space was much less about doing and succeeding, and more about being, than any I'd previously encountered. The biggest challenge was to grow in being...being open, being present, being me.

While I was still new in my community, our community leader asked a small group of us new assistants to organise and animate a big retreat in celebration of twenty years of l'Arche Lambeth. It struck me as a foolish decision from our community leader; none of us knew l'Arche well enough to host such a big and public event. Nonetheless, we went ahead, and in doing so discovered that the request was fundamentally an invitation to grow in trust. Trust was being placed in me—could I respond in trust?

This experience, which was not without its practical difficulties, opened my heart to the hidden foundation of our life in l'Arche. We need skills, we need patience, we need celebrations and prayers, we need to create spaces where the gifts of the people with disabilities are recognised and delighted in, but in order to do all of this, we must learn to trust.

Staying longer in l'Arche is, for me, a journey without a map or clear destination. It is a journey full of risks. The community changes as it grows in understanding of the needs of the people with learning disabilities, as new people come and other people leave. I may be asked to move to another house or project within the community. My belonging cannot be defined by any one relationship, by any one job,

by any one house. And yet, I've been led into a deeper sense and understanding of belonging which is based in something hugely fragile: in learning to keep trusting,



despite my vulnerability, despite the vulnerability of the others, I am discovering that our shared trust, in the God who loves us because of our vulnerability, because we are flawed and can only try, is both the most fragile reality in our community, and our biggest strength.

We cannot know the shape of tomorrow; yet together we grow in trust that we will meet God there, through one another, through the simple tasks of our life.

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